

Celebrity Politicians: Political Legitimacy in the 2024 Election in Indonesia

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Abstract: The involvement of celebrity politicians in Indonesia's 2024 General Election reflects a significant transformation in electoral democracy, where political competition increasingly emphasizes popularity and media visibility rather than substantive political capacity. This study aims to examine how celebrity politicians construct political legitimacy through communication strategies and narrative framing on social media during the 2024 election in Indonesia. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using content analysis with thematic analysis supported by NVivo 12 Plus. The data consist of secondary sources, including online news media, academic literature, and documented social media content related to celebrity politicians participating in the election. These data were analyzed to identify dominant communication patterns, symbolic narratives, and legitimacy-building strategies used by celebrity candidates. The findings indicate that celebrity politicians tend to rely on popularity, media exposure, and personal branding to strengthen political legitimacy among voters. However, the legitimacy produced through these strategies tends to be symbolic rather than substantive, as it emphasizes image construction rather than political competence or policy capacity. This phenomenon reflects the growing dominance of political personalization in Indonesia's electoral politics and highlights challenges in maintaining the quality of democratic representation.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the largest democracies in the world, with a population of more than 267 million people and a high level of social and political diversity (Kalembang, 2024). Ahead of the 2024 General Election, the national political landscape has become increasingly complex and competitive. Within this context, a notable phenomenon has emerged in the form of the growing involvement of celebrities in electoral politics, both as legislative candidates and as political endorsers (Maddi & Purnomo, 2025). Celebrity politicians, who originate from the entertainment and mass media industries, are increasingly regarded as strategic actors in political communication due to their popularity, public visibility, and ability to establish emotional connections with voters (Archer & Cawston, 2022).

The rise of celebrity politicians reflects a broader transformation in contemporary political practices, shifting from a programmatic orientation toward a more symbolic and performative form of politics. Their presence not only reshapes campaign strategies but also raises fundamental questions about political legitimacy, particularly legitimacy constructed through popularity and media visibility rather than political competence, experience, or governance capacity (de-Lima-Santos et al., 2024). In representative democratic systems, political legitimacy should ideally derive not only from electoral support but also from the ability of political actors to effectively perform representative functions and govern in an accountable manner (Beta & Neyazi, 2022).

The phenomenon of celebrity politicians is closely linked to the rapid development of digital technology, which has significantly transformed patterns of political communication. Social media platforms have become primary arenas for celebrity politicians to construct their political identity and communicate directly with voters without relying on traditional political

institutions Archer et al., 2020). In this context, digital platforms function not merely as channels of communication but also as spaces of political representation, where visual imagery, symbolic affiliations, and narratives of closeness are strategically employed to construct political legitimacy (Pricilla & Iqbal Daulay, 2023). Consequently, substantive discussions of policy programs are often overshadowed by the dominance of image-building and performative political communication (Park et al., 2020).

Although popularity can increase electoral appeal, it does not necessarily translate into strong or sustainable political legitimacy. Several studies indicate that celebrity politicians frequently face criticism regarding their limited political experience and governance capacity. To address these limitations, they often rely on intensive digital campaigns and symbolic interactions to build credibility and public trust (Sugiarto, 2023). However, popularity generated through social media does not automatically guarantee normative political legitimacy, even though it may influence voter preferences and voting intentions (Khamimiya et al., 2023).

Previous studies on celebrity politics have primarily focused on media framing, political communication strategies, and public perceptions of celebrities entering political arenas. For instance Alvin (2023) highlights how media narratives shape public perceptions of celebrity politicians, while Galuh Larasati et al., (2023), examine public attitudes toward artists and comedians participating in political contests. Similarly, Siswanto & Ahwan (2024). find that public acceptance of celebrity politicians is often influenced more by popularity and media image than by their political track records.

Despite the growing body of literature on celebrity politics, most previous studies have primarily focused on media framing, political communication strategies, and public perceptions of celebrities entering political arenas. While these studies provide important insights into how celebrity status influences political communication and voter engagement, they pay relatively limited attention to how political legitimacy is constructed and sustained by celebrity politicians within democratic institutions (Aliah et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, existing research tends to examine the popularity of celebrity candidates or public attitudes toward entertainers in politics, but comprehensive analyses that link celebrity politics with the broader issue of political legitimacy in electoral democracy remain limited. Moreover, the role of digital political communication in shaping the legitimacy of celebrity politicians during electoral contests has not been sufficiently explored.

In addition, studies on political elites suggest that dominant political actors may influence policy directions to accommodate particular interests rather than the broader public interest. This perspective is relevant to the phenomenon of celebrity politicians in the 2024 elections, where popularity and social capital are frequently utilized as primary sources of political legitimacy without necessarily reflecting political capacity or integrity. As a result, the increasing reliance on celebrity popularity may potentially influence democratic decision-making processes and the quality of political representation.

Therefore, this study seeks to address the identified research gap by examining how political legitimacy is constructed, negotiated, and perceived in relation to celebrity politicians in the 2024 elections in Indonesia. By focusing on the intersection between celebrity politics, digital political communication, and political legitimacy, this research contributes to the broader literature by providing a deeper understanding of how popularity, media visibility, and symbolic political performance shape the legitimacy of political actors in contemporary democratic systems. Furthermore, this study provides empirical insights into the implications of celebrity politics for democratic representation and political legitimacy in Indonesia, particularly in the context of the increasing dominance of digital political communication in electoral politics.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis to examine how celebrity politicians construct political legitimacy through social media during the 2024 elections in Indonesia. The unit of analysis consists of digital political communication content produced by celebrity politicians, including images, short videos, captions, and campaign messages posted on their official social media accounts, as well as online news coverage related to their political activities.

The data used in this study are secondary data obtained from social media platforms and online news articles relevant to celebrity politics and political communication. Data were collected using documentation and literature study techniques during the 2024 election campaign period from October 2023 to February 2024. In total, approximately 120 units of digital content consisting of social media posts and online news reports were collected and selected based on their relevance to the research topic.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis supported by NVivo 12 Plus software. The analysis process involved several stages, including importing the collected data into NVivo, conducting coding to identify key concepts and patterns, grouping the coded data into broader themes, and interpreting these themes to understand how celebrity politicians construct political legitimacy through digital communication strategies. Consistent with the characteristics of qualitative research, this study focuses on in-depth interpretation of communication patterns and political narratives rather than hypothesis testing (Zitri & Kurniawan, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Influence of Celebrity Politicians' Popularity and Political Quality in the 2024 General Election

The presence of celebrities in electoral districts reflects the political dynamics of elections, which are increasingly influenced by media exposure and image construction (Massagony et al., 2025). Popularity, which has developed throughout world history, is used as a political tool to attract public attention, especially from those familiar with popular lifestyles. In the context of contemporary political communication, this phenomenon is closely related to the concept of celebrity politics, where public fame and media visibility become strategic political resources that can influence voter perceptions and behavior. In this context, popularity functions as a tool to mobilize the public, as individuals who are already known by the public have broader access to voters through social media and mass media (Siti Murfatiah, 2025). Previous studies have also shown that celebrity politicians are often able to build emotional connections with voters more quickly than conventional politicians due to the familiarity and attachment formed through the entertainment industry. In this way, selective politics can build emotional bonds with the general public more quickly than conventional politics (Siti Murfatiah1, 2025).

However, popularity does not always correlate with political quality. Political quality encompasses the ability to understand national issues, the ability to discuss policies, and integrity in carrying out legislative and executive (Kissas, 2024). From a democratic perspective, voter decisions ideally should be based not only on popularity but also on the competence and political capacity of candidates to perform their public responsibilities. In this context, voters need to conduct a rational analysis of the capacity of political elites, not just an analysis of popularity (Zein et al., 2024). The 2024 general election is a crucial step in determining whether the election of leaders in the political arena is merely symbolic or capable of contributing meaningfully to the democratic process (Khusna et al., 2024). Therefore, popularity can only be a determining factor if it is combined with strong public support and political capabilities that can be evaluated objectively and professionally.

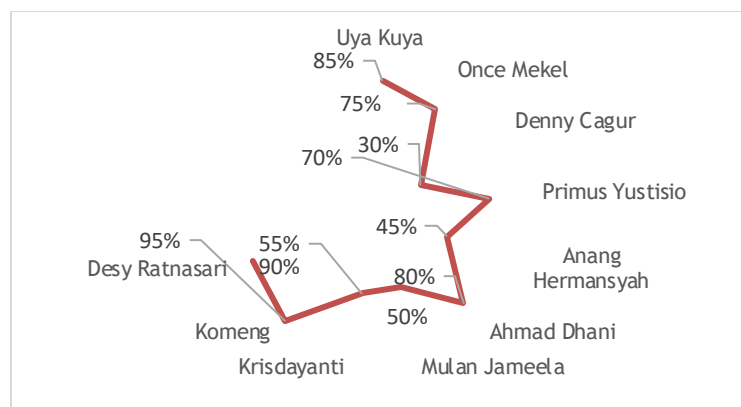


Figure 1. The utility of celebrity popularity in the 2024 general election
Source: Processed using NVivo 12 Plus

Based on Figure 1 above, the popularity of a number of significant celebrities has been successfully converted into real political support, both in terms of meaningful gains and election as legislative members. Komeng achieved the highest ranking with a popularity utility of 95%, indicating that his effectiveness as a comedian was maximized through a specific method: simply displaying unconventional photos in public spaces without a massive campaign, yet securing over 1.9 million votes for the West Java Regional Representative Council (DPD). This finding supports previous research which states that symbolic political communication strategies, including visual representation and media visibility, can significantly strengthen the public appeal of celebrity candidates in electoral contests.

The top two are Desy Ratnasari (90%) and Ahmad Dhani (80%), who are not only well-known in the entertainment world but also have political experience, making their popularity easier to translate into political support in the eyes of the public (Brubaker, 2020). This indicates that the combination of media popularity and political experience can strengthen public trust and increase electoral success among celebrity politicians.

On the other hand, Denny Cagur only has a popularity rating of 30%, indicating that although he is well-known on national television, his popularity does not attract significant electoral support. Anang Hermansyah (45%) and Mulan Jameela (50%) also face a similar situation, where their popularity is not strong enough to support their campaigns or limit competition in densely populated constituencies. On the other hand, Once Mekel (75%) and Krisdayanti (55%) occupy a middle ground. They have big names, but not everyone votes for them by placing them on the ballot (Shomron & Abdulaev, 2022). These findings indicate that popularity alone is not sufficient to guarantee electoral success, as it must be supported by effective political communication strategies and strong political networks. This indicates that popularity not supported by political communication strategies and strong constitutional roots does not always lead to success (Maddi & Purnomo, 2025).

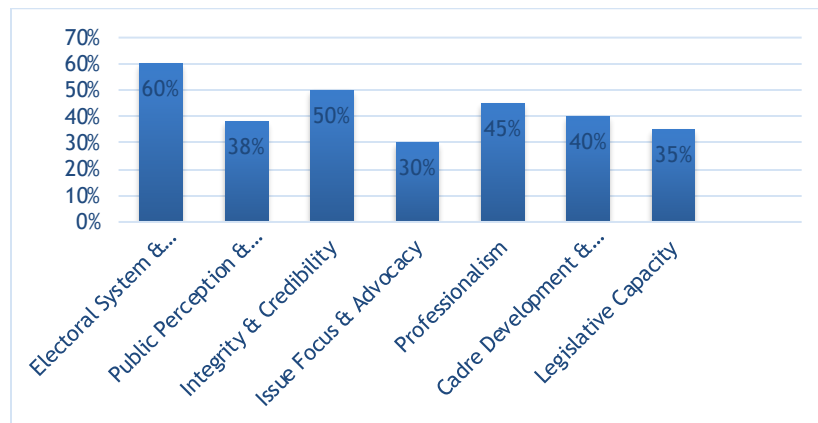


Figure 2. Political Quality

Source: Processed using NVivo 12 Plus

Based on Figure 2 above, the phenomenon of celebrity political involvement in the 2024 elections presents a scenario that raises several issues for Indonesian democracy. In general, the political quality of celebrities who run for office is often found to be relatively limited in several important dimensions. The most significant aspect is their focus on issues and advocacy, which only reaches around 30%. Their political views are unclear, and they consistently use their candidacy as a tool for personal branding alone. This finding is consistent with previous studies which state that celebrity politicians often prioritize personal image and media visibility rather than policy-oriented political engagement.

In addition, their legislative capacity is rated at 35%, indicating that they have minimal understanding and experience in evaluating regulations, formulating policies, or drafting laws. This will have a significant impact on the public's ability to contribute to the legislative process. According to individuals who transition from the entertainment industry to political institutions often face difficulties in adapting to complex legislative responsibilities and policy-making processes.

Furthermore, the aspects of cadre development and political readiness also show low scores (40%). Most celebrities are recruited by parties not because of their long-term dedication to political work, but because they are considered vote-getters (Subekti et al., 2024). The cadre development process, which should be a gateway to strengthening the quality of democracy, is neglected in favor of immediate electoral interests.

In terms of professionalism, celebrities show a moderate level (45%), meaning that some of them have a good work ethic, but many remain passive in carrying out their representative duties in parliament (Maulana, 2024). Meanwhile, in terms of integrity and credibility, celebrities score relatively better (50%). This is due to the public image they have previously built in the entertainment world, which they then carry over into the political world. However, public image alone cannot be used as a reliable indicator of political integrity, as democratic accountability requires measurable contributions to public policy and governance (Hubner & Watts, 2024).

Legitimacy and Quality of Democracy in the 2024 Elections

The 2024 elections will be a crucial test of electoral legitimacy in Indonesia (Akabay, 2025), especially in the context of growing public skepticism about the integrity of political institutions (Annoni, 2025). Legitimacy is not determined by the results of the election, but by the process itself whether the election is conducted fairly, efficiently, and competitively (Muhammad Anwar, 2024). In the current political reality, the potential for oligarchic intervention, institutional bias, and issues of neutrality among election organizers (KPU, Bawaslu, DKPP) can cause serious distortions to legitimacy (Besson, 2024). When development is formalized, public trust in the democratic system erodes, creating space for corruption and the delegitimization of development

outcomes (Brinkmann, 2024). From a democratic quality perspective, the 2024 elections identify unaddressed structural challenges, ranging from minimal ideological differences between parties to political personalization and poor transnational practices (Buchmeier & Vogt, 2024). Quality democracy requires not only political parties but also open public debate, citizen participation, and competitive politics based on performance rather than popularity or financial resources. In this context, Indonesian democracy continues to be based on electoralism, which treats voters as the final stage rather than on institutional and substantive democratic norms. Therefore, if the 2024 elections fail to implement more comprehensive political reforms, Indonesian democracy risks collapsing due to a stagnant process that only benefits the elite and not the people (Ganuthula & Balaraman, 2025).

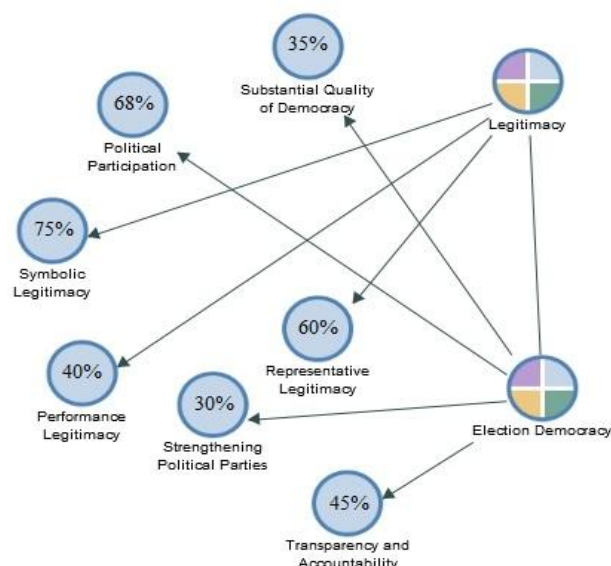


Figure 3 Legitimacy and Quality of Democracy in the 2024 Election
Source: Processed Using NVivo 12 Plus

Based on Figure 3 above, the phenomenon of celebrity politics highlights the importance of legitimacy and the quality of democracy in Indonesia. Based on the analyzed data, the dimension with the highest score is symbolic legitimacy, reaching 75%. This indicates that celebrities have a very high level of public recognition, primarily due to their popularity in the entertainment world. This finding supports the argument that media visibility and public familiarity can create symbolic legitimacy even before political performance is fully demonstrated.

Furthermore, the presence of celebrities also has a significant impact on political participation, especially among younger voters. With a score of 68%, the political participation dimension shows that the appeal of celebrities can mobilize previously unresponsive groups in society. Previous research also indicates that popular culture figures can play an important role in increasing political engagement among younger generations who are often less interested in conventional political actors (Tan-intaraarj, 2021).

However, this success is not enough to improve the quality of their work in the legislative body. The weakness lies in the validity of the work dimension, which only achieved a score of 40%. Most celebrities failed to actively engage in legislative, policy making, or advocacy processes. The dimension of transparency and accountability also shows a relatively moderate score (45%), indicating that many celebrity politicians have not clearly communicated their political agendas or policy commitments to the public. This situation reflects a broader trend in contemporary politics where political personalization and image-building often dominate substantive policy debates.

Therefore, although celebrity politicians can enhance symbolic legitimacy and increase electoral participation, their contribution to strengthening democratic quality remains limited.

These findings suggest that the presence of celebrity politicians must be accompanied by stronger institutional mechanisms, including political training, accountability systems, and policy-oriented political engagement, so that their participation can contribute more meaningfully to democratic consolidation.

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the development of the literature on celebrity politics and political legitimacy by providing empirical evidence from the context of Indonesia's 2024 general election. While previous studies have largely focused on the role of celebrity popularity in increasing electoral visibility and voter mobilization, the findings of this research demonstrate that popularity alone does not automatically translate into strong political quality or effective democratic representation. By combining the analysis of popularity, political quality, and legitimacy dimensions, this study highlights the gap between symbolic political capital and substantive political performance among celebrity politicians. In addition, this research expands the discussion on celebrity politics by showing how media-driven popularity can strengthen symbolic legitimacy and increase political participation, while at the same time revealing limitations in legislative capacity, policy engagement, and party institutionalization. Therefore, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how celebrity politicians influence both electoral dynamics and the broader quality of democracy in emerging democratic contexts such as Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the increasing involvement of celebrity politicians in Indonesia's 2024 General Election reflects the growing dominance of popularity, media visibility, and personal branding in shaping electoral competition. Celebrity candidates are able to convert their public recognition into electoral support by utilizing symbolic communication strategies and strong media exposure, which help construct political legitimacy among voters. However, the legitimacy obtained through these strategies tends to be symbolic rather than substantive, as it often emphasizes image construction rather than political competence, policy capacity, or legislative experience. This condition highlights the persistence of political personalization within Indonesia's electoral system and reveals structural weaknesses in political party recruitment and cadre development, where celebrity candidates are frequently nominated primarily as vote-getters rather than as individuals with strong ideological commitment or political expertise. Although the presence of celebrity politicians can increase public attention and electoral participation, their limited political capacity may potentially affect the effectiveness of legislative performance and democratic representation. Therefore, strengthening political party institutionalization, improving merit-based recruitment mechanisms, and enhancing political education for voters are essential to ensure that electoral legitimacy is supported by substantive democratic performance. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and qualitative media content analysis, which does not fully capture voter perceptions or internal party dynamics. Future research is therefore recommended to employ mixed-method approaches, including voter surveys and in-depth interviews, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impact of celebrity politicians on political legitimacy and democratic quality in Indonesia.

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